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TAGS: KMDR JO
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ ELECTION AND US AND
THE MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, February 1, highlights King Abdullah's remarks during an exclusive interview with CNN vis--vis the Iraq election and regional developments. Major stories continue to highlight the aftermath of the Iraq election.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq Election

-- "The elections' relative success"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/01): "Abstinence on the part of the Sunnis is not an option now. One must acknowledge the fact that history does not move backwards and that there will not be Sunni hegemony in the political system. This past is dead and gone, and the Sunnis must join the rest of the components of the Iraqi people in order to forge a new, fair and balanced partnership. One can find many faults with the elections, but the people went to the ballot boxes to underscore the democratic and peaceful option for the new Iraq. It is the option of the majority of Iraqis and it will definitely lead to the end of the occupation. The Sunnis' option to resist and thwart the political process puts them not only against the Americans, but also against two thirds of the Iraqi people. As for their option to take part in the political process, this would put them with the majority of Iraqi people against occupation and for independence and stability."

-- "The occupation scenario and the elections"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back-page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/01): "The U.S. administration and President George Bush consider the elections a success because they reaffirm their proposals and their justifications for invading Iraq.. Whatever the case may be, the elections comprise a domestic affair of Iraq at the end of the day, even if they were held under dubious American circumstances. They could be the start of the coming together of all the political forces in Iraq towards restoring a free and united Iraq and putting an end to the occupation."

-- "The Iraqi election determines Bush's standing domestically and abroad"

Daily columnist Yagoub Jaber writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/01): "The Iraqis did not vote only on the fate of their country, but also on the internal and external standing and leadership of President George Bush.. While Bush claimed that his reelection was an expression of popular support for his policy on Iraq, he finds his political power waning if the elections fail to put forth a stable government in view of the escalation of resistance.. The elections may lead to the establishment of a stable government in Iraq, which would strengthen Bush's international standing and his position as the president who managed to promote democracy in the Middle East. Most observers argue, however, that violence is going to increase after the elections and that resistance activities are going to escalate.. With or without elections, the United States is finding itself in trouble and wishes to find an honorable way out."

-- "About the Iraqi election and the extensive participation"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/01): "Looking at the issue of voting and

its percentage, it is futile to view with confidence any numbers put forth by people who are completely biased in favor of the election process and who naturally would do everything they can to give these numbers a certificate of excellence in order to confirm the correctness of their political path. The [election] process, from A to Z, was a process controlled by the occupation and those cooperating with it.. The voting percentage does not mean much, because those who boycotted did not do so except out of a firm conviction. More significantly, the majority of those who boycotted represent a sect that is not only a fourth of the Iraqi people, but also a sect that cannot be marginalized or ignored, particularly when it is leading the resistance against the occupation; a resistance did more to force the hand of the occupation to undertake the elections than those cooperating with the occupation.. George Bush and the neo-conservatives must now bring in a new charm to their arrangement in the next stage. The election, which was their promotional material for the past few months, is over, and now they have to rid themselves of the accusation of being occupiers, and that is at a time when their forces are still in the country."

-- "The region after the elections"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/01): "There is a prevailing illusion in the political arena in most of the countries of the region that the United States wants to strengthen the status quo and stability and preserve the prevalent rules of the political game that have existed since the rise of the independent Arab states. In fact, these rules are being overturned, starting with the Iraqi experience, and the process of redrawing the geo-political map is now at hand following the Iraqi election."

-- "Iraq: winning hearts and not the media"

Columnist Rana Sabbagh writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (02/01): "The U.S. administration and Britain, along with all the international and most of the TV satellite channels, have exaggerated the 'ceremony of democracy' and have portrayed the process as proof for all those who doubted that the Iraqis, followed by the Arabs, can pick the fruits of democracy and reform planted by the West. It would have been better for Bush and his allies to show greater caution and not put too much make-up on the face of Iraq, lest expectations rise too high and then crash due to developments on the ground. The most important thing about the next stage is the effort that will be exerted to achieve legitimate political reconciliation between the Iraqi parties that boycotted the election and those that took part in it. It behooves the world, particularly the countries that opposed the war, to unite and cooperate in order to make sure that Iraq does not deviate from the track of democracy in the future and that the occupation forces leave and give Iraq's sovereignty back to the Iraqis.. Many of us, leaders and people, can learn from the experience of the recent Iraqi election vis--vis the expansion of popular participation in the decision-making process and respect for opinions and basic human rights. It is sad that, while the Iraqi people and the Palestinian people have exercised their right to vote under difficult political, social and economic circumstances and in the face of the guns of Israeli and American occupation forces, some Arab leaders continue the race to hold on to their seats and to forge the will of the people using legal loopholes and submission, instead of listening to the will of the people and the ballot box. It is better for us that we take matters into our own hands when it comes to reform and development, instead of wasting time and leaving our future in the hands of a West that will, without a doubt, impose that future on the Arab region in the service of its own interests."

Editorial Commentary on US and the Middle East
-- "Arabs on the hot stove"

Chief Editor Usama Sharif writes on the back-page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/01): "This is truly the age of contradictions. Some of us are against the Iraq elections because they take place under the occupation, while others see in them a way out of the occupation. Many of those who were offended by the Iraqi people's participation in the elections had kept their silence when the Iraqis were suffering from the abuse of their leaders. Some

of us are against the peace settlement with Israel, while others have no problem paying the price if peace is established. We are against America at the popular level but officially we are America's closest allies. We are against Iran because it has designs over Iraq, but we support its right to develop its nuclear reactor because it threatens Israel. We are against the west when it criticizes us, but sing the praise of its democracy and wish it for ourselves. We are against calls for reform imposed from outside because they are suspicious, but we support the enemies of our enemies because of joint interests.. Who are we and what do we want? It is time to face ourselves and to salvage what is left of our existence, because the awaited awakening will not come to pass until we stop breaking the looking glass, which reflects our ugliness. It is time to admit that the ugliness is in us."

-- "Promoting democracy and freedom a la Condoleezza Rice"

Daily columnist George Haddad writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/01): "In her first meeting with State Department employees, the new U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said that 'history calls upon the United States to implement the bold agenda that was proposed by President George Bush for spreading freedom and democracy in the world'. Rice also anticipated the prosperity of democracy even in the infertile land of the West Bank, Iraq and Afghanistan.. Yes, in this overwhelmed region, there is some disease, ignorance and poverty and even some terrorism; there is also some convenient absence of freedom and democracy and some totalitarianism and horrific ill distribution of wealth. Yet, all these backward and horrible phenomena are, upon reflection and careful consideration, the results of forcibly imposed situations, in which parties that benefit from their continuation of these phenomena take part. These parties are: the external party, represented by the plans of colonialists and the Zionist invaders, and the internal party, represented by the local pillar of political institutions and religious and sectarian sectors.. The new Secretary comes along with pre-polluted ideas that bring the joy of victory to no one but those responsible for Zionist lies and promotions, which seek to deform facts, falsify realities and clean the records of invaders, usurpers and occupiers of atrocities committed in terms of invasion, murder and destruction. What is worse is that this Secretary is ruling on these falsifications armed with the ideas of promoting freedom and democracy. We agree with Madame Secretary that 'history calls upon the United States to work promoting freedom and democracy', provided that there is a realization and an awareness that usurpation and occupation have nothing to do with freedom and democracy, but are rather the opposite."

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